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Women's inscriptions recently discovered by the AFSM at the Awām temple/Maḥram Bilqīs in Marib, Yemen

Mohammed Maraqten

Summary
The recent excavations of the AFSM at the Awām temple, modern Maḥram Bilqīs, have yielded over 500 inscriptions. Although the majority of the texts recovered from the temple are dedicatory, we also have legal, religious, and literary inscriptions as well as texts dedicated by, or referring to, women. Only about fifteen inscriptions refer to women making dedications to the god Almaqah, lord of Awām. This paper gives a general report on the women's inscriptions and their content as well as the epigraphic evidence for the study of Sabaean women. In addition to their role in the family, their health, several aspects of their status as women, including their economic and cultic role in Sabaean society, are briefly discussed. In addition, two recently discovered inscriptions are published here.

Keywords: women, Sabaʾ, Yemen, epigraphy, South Arabian

Excavations at the Awām temple/Maḥram Bilqīs by the AFSM (American Foundation for the Study of Man), under the direction of Mrs Merilyn Phillips-Hodgson, have yielded over 500 inscriptions (Figs 1 & 2). (1) The majority of the texts recovered from the temple are dedicatory. However, legal, religious, and literary texts as well as inscriptions dedicated by women have been found. These new inscriptions not only increase our knowledge of the Sabaic language in general, but also contain important data on the cultural, social, and political history of ancient Yemen (Maraqten 2004; 2006). Of the several hundred Sabaean inscriptions, those by, or concerning, women form only a small group (2005), but they provide good data about the status of women in South Arabian society and insights into its social structure.

The purpose of this paper is to give a general statement about the content of inscriptions that mention dedications by women, as well as an overview of some other inscriptions mentioning women. After a review of some of the women's inscriptions discovered by the AFSM in the 1950s, some information from those recently discovered at the Awām temple will be presented. However, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the status of women in South Arabia in general or Sabaʾ in particular. It simply aims to present the contribution of the epigraphic data from Maḥram Bilqīs to the study of the history of Sabaean women, as well as some aspects of the roles of women within Sabaean society. Several aspects will be discussed here such as marriage and the family, women's economic and cultic role, as well as the health care of women. Two recently discovered women's inscriptions will be also presented.

Sources for the study of the status of women in ancient South Arabia: the contribution of the inscriptions of Maḥram Bilqīs

Our knowledge of the status of women in ancient Yemen is still very limited (Beeston 1979: 120–122; 1983; Stiegner 1989; Frantsouzoff 1999). With a few exceptions the history of women in ancient Yemen, like that of their contemporaries elsewhere in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean region (e.g. Marsman 2003: 43ff.; Harris 1994), has been largely neglected by scholars. At present, little information is available about women in the Old Sabaean period (eighth century to second century BC). (2) The Maḥram Bilqīs inscriptions, which are dated to the Middle Sabaean period (first century BC to the fourth century AD), constitute the most important source for women's status in ancient Yemen. The study of these texts provides information on women in the family and their activities as legally and economically active persons.



Figure 1. *The Awām temple.*

However, there are still gaps in our knowledge and these texts do not permit a more complete and coherent picture of the lives of women in Sabaᵓ.

In addition to the inscriptions discovered at Maḥram Bilqīs by the AFSM, there are also several women's inscriptions, which were recently discovered by the German Archaeological Institute at the Maḥram Bilqīs/Awām cemetery. These inscriptions are primarily engraved on limestone funerary stelae. Some of them have carved alabaster heads of women fixed in niches carved in these stelae and most have short inscriptions, which mainly give their names and filiations (Nebes 2002). (3) Moreover, there are a number of women's inscriptions which have been found in unscientific excavations but which according to their contents seem to have originated from Maḥram Bilqīs (e.g. YM 441 = CIAS I: 87–89, 39.11/r 1). Sabaic texts engraved on wood (primarily on palm-leaf stalks) also add useful information about the role of women in everyday life and business affairs. (4) Any study of the status of women in ancient Yemen should take into account this new category of Sabaic texts.

Several categories of inscriptions can be distinguished, namely dedicatory, legal, expiation, and confession texts (e.g. Ja 525). There are also texts that show that women themselves organized the construction of their houses (YMN 19, Wādī as-Sirr 1) or their graves (DJE 10, Müller 1972: 81f.; CIH 21). Some inscriptions mention that a man and his wife carried out the construction, possibly of a house (Nāmī 66).

Women are primarily mentioned in the dedicatory inscriptions, of which two groups can be distinguished, viz. (a) inscriptions dedicated by women themselves; and (b) inscriptions which mention women in their roles as mothers, daughters, wives, or servants, as well as in a legal context etc. The first group is the most significant because these inscriptions show the initiative of women



Figure 2. *The Awām temple, Area A.*

themselves, by expressing their wishes and revealing their personalities. We refer to this group as "women's inscriptions". These form a relatively small proportion of the Maḥram Bilqīs inscriptions found in the 1950s, about twenty texts or approximately 5 % of the total number of inscriptions discovered at that period.

Among the recently discovered inscriptions are some fifteen dedications to the god Almaqah made by women. This forms approximately 4 % of the inscriptions found in the recent campaigns. Among these are five so-called confession and expiation texts (e.g. MB 2004 S I-22, MB 2005 I-26, MB 2005 I-121), and several recently discovered inscriptions mention women in their roles as wives, daughters etc. (5)

The inscriptions discovered in the 1950s in which women were the dedicants of offerings are the following: Ja 686, 706, 717, 721, 722, 731, 742, 743, 751, 764; Ir 24, 34; ZI 24; CIAS I: 87–89, 39.11/r1; CIAS II: 49–53, 39.11/o3 no. 8; CIAS II: 75–77, 39.11/o5 no. 3; while the following are examples from the recent campaigns: MB 2004 I-85, MB 2004 I-109, MB 2004 I-172, MB 2005 I-20, MB 2005 I-34, MB 2005 I-62.

The South Arabian epigraphic sources mention more than 600 women by name and filiation. In her dissertation on women's names in Ancient South Arabian inscriptions, Sholan (1999: 30–42) lists 545 names. (6) More than 400 are Sabaic and the rest are Qatabanic, Minaic, and Hadhramitic. Moreover, of these 400 names, some 300 are from the inscriptions of Maḥram Bilqīs, a fact which proves the importance of the Awām temple in the life of Sabaean women, and the recent AFSM excavations at the Awām temple have added a couple of new women's names.

Women are mentioned in the Sabaean inscriptions in different terms. The common Sabaean terms for women are *ʾṯt/ʾnṯt* "woman, female, wife"; *ḥs²kt* "wife"

and *s²ᶜt* "(female) spouse, marital partner"; *ʾẖt* "sister"; *ʾm* "mother"; *bnt* "daughter"; *ḡlmt* "unmarried girl"; *mrʾt* "daughter, lady", *ʾmt* (pl. *ʾmh*) "(female) servant, slave"; *mlkt* "queen"; *rs²yt* "priestess" (MB 2005 I-39/1, Maraqten 2005: 378); *mqtwyt* "an administrative position", *bᶜlt* "an administrative position in the temple", *ẖdmt* "(female) servant"; and *qrs²t* "a woman has an administrative position" (as "herdsman?" in SD 107; Sholan 1999: 22f. translates this term as "Hirtin"). (7) The plural terms *ʾwld/ʾlwd* and the collective *wld* (< sg. *wld*), are used for children regardless of sex. The term *bᶜl* "master, lord" is also used in the sense of "husband". Other terms for husband are *ʾs¹*, *ʾys¹*, and *mrʾ*. The word *byt* is used for "family, lineage, clan, and village". (8)

Both groups of inscriptions from Maḥram Bilqīs — the AFSM discoveries of the 1950s and those found in recent campaigns — are broadly of the same types and contents. All are dedicatory or have a dedicatory character. The offerings were usually female statues. The inscriptions deal primarily with everyday themes such as safety and help in childbirth. Among both groups are several which deal with women's health issues, such as giving birth, giving thanks for having children, or recovery from sickness or distress. Some record information about the status of the women, such as that she was *ʾmt/mlkn* "a servant of the king". Thus the newly discovered inscriptions add new insights into the position of women in Sabaean society.

The following are some examples of the content of these texts. A woman makes a dedication to Almaqah for the safety of her husband and her children (ZI 24); a woman makes an offering for the safety of her children (Ja 742); a woman thanks Almaqah for granting her both male and female children (Ja 742); another woman, called Magdḥalak, makes a dedication to Almaqah for granting her male and female children (Ja 743). The inscriptions frequently mention that women made successive dedications because Almaqah granted them children (Ja 686, 721, 764). Women in their role as mothers occur several times, such as taking care of their daughters and making dedications for their safety: for instance a woman dedicated a female statuette in thanks for her daughter's safe delivery of a baby girl (YM 2403, Nāmī 22, cf. also Haram 35 = RES 3956).

We have good information about children from the Maḥram Bilqīs texts (Preißler 1994: 223–229). Male children were preferred to female, and the inscriptions of Maḥram Bilqīs mention several times that people wish for children with *kwkbt/ṣdqm* "stars of Fortune", e.g. a person wishes *ʾwldm / ʾḏkrm / hnʾm / ḏ-kwkbt / ṣdqm* "healthy male children with lucky stars" (Ja 703/5–6; see also Ja 567/23; 655/12–13; RES 4938/15–17; and Ryckmans J 1975). The same formula occurs in a recently discovered inscription from Maḥram Bilqīs (MB 2004 S I-62/11).

Women are also mentioned many times in dedications made by men. Thus, men thanked Almaqah for the safety of their daughters (Ja 694/6; 690/7), or their wives (e.g. RES 4938; MB 2004 I-33/7; MB 2004 I-81/3; MB 2004 I-86/15; MB 2004 I-122/20). The inscription CIAS I: 79–81, 39.11/o 6 no. 4 = YM 440 is a dedication by a man and his wife for their safety. In another fragmentary inscription, a man makes an offering to the goddess ᶜUzzayān/al-ᶜUzzā for the healing *lbthw / ʾmtᶜzyn / k-ḥlẓ[t..]* "of his daughter Amatᶜuzzayān from the disease from which she suffered" (CIH 558/ 6–7). Two men thanked Almaqah for the safety of their "maidservants and wives" (Ja 594/8). As another example, a man and his children made their dedication for their safety, and the children mentioned that this was also for the safety of their mother (Ja 719/1–7). A man and his wife thanked Almaqah in their inscription because he helped them in a successful lawsuit (Hamilton 9). Another man thanked Almaqah for granting children to his wife (Ir 29 §2). In yet another inscription, a man and his brother made their dedication because they had had a child *bn / ʾṯthmw* "from their wife", i.e. the wife of one of them (e.g. Ja 738/9), (9) and another text mentions that two men thanked Almaqah for five children whom their wife had born (Müller 1). This text has been considered as evidence for polyandry (see below). Another man and his brother made a dedication and asked for children of either gender, but the god granted them a son, for which they made the dedication. The passage reads: [6]*…wldm / ʾs¹m / fʾw / ʾṯt* [7]*m* "children both males and females" (CIAS II: 75–77, 39.11/o 5 no. 3). Men made dedications because their wives had born them children: *ḥs²kthw* "his wife" (e.g. Ir 29 §2), *ʾṯthw* "his wife" (e.g. Ja 655/7) and *ʾṯthmw* "their wife" (e.g. CIAS II: 75–77, 39.11/o 5 no. 3; MB 2004 S I-44/7). The inscriptions do not provide any information about the wives of kings or their desire to have children. The only reference is to the wife of the Yadaᶜʾīl Yaluṭ, king of Ḥaḍramawt (see below).

Women are also mentioned in legal texts as well as in the so-called expiation and confession inscriptions (Ja 525; CIAS I: 87–89, 39.11/r 1 = YM 441). (10) These texts are an important source for understanding the cult and rituals in the Awām temple as well as the regulations for visiting the temple. Moreover, among the Sabaean legal inscriptions there are the so-called texts of transfer, dealing

with property. Three Sabaean monumental inscriptions mention the transfer of clients, including women (Fa 76, Fa 3, RES 3960), from one party to another, and there is one text on a palm-leaf stalk dealing with the transfer of women from one tribe to another (Stein 2003).

The following are some examples of the contents of the newly discovered texts. A woman and her daughter made a dedication to Almaqah for their safety and that of their children (MB 2005 I-93). We have another inscription recording the dedication by a priestess of the temple Ḥarūnum to Almaqah, because he had protected her when she gave birth to a boy (MB 2005 I-39). (11) Dedications were made as thanks for the safety of a woman in childbirth (MB 2004 I-109) and thanks for the life of sons and the birth of a boy (MB 2005 I-62). A woman thanked Almaqah for her delivery from sickness (MB 2005 I-20). Another inscription is a dedication by four women in gratitude for their recovery from distress (MB 2004 I-85). A further dedication from a man and his wife was for delivery from an epidemic (MB 2005 I-34). Another man thanked Almaqah for granting his daughter children (MB 2004 I-120/6), and an offering by a man to Almaqah was made in gratitude for the marriage of his two sisters (MB 2005 I-56, see below). Women are also mentioned in these texts in relation to purity (e.g. MB 2005 I-88).

Among the recently discovered documents are four of the so-called expiation and confession texts dealing with women. In one of them a man was punished by the god Almaqah because he abused his female servants (*w-s¹bṭhw*, MB 2006 I-73/7). One of these inscriptions mentions that a man made an offering because he had violated his wife (MB 2006 I-46). A penitential text refers to a dedication to Almaqah and mentions the Mother Goddess Umm ʿAṯtar in the context (MB 2004 S I-59); while another penitential inscription records the dedication by a woman and her daughter to Almaqah. These women designate themselves as *ʾmh / ʾmʿṯtr* "worshippers or maidservants of (the goddess) Umm ʿAṯtar" (MB 2004 S I-22). (12)

Women are also mentioned among the captured persons in military reports, e.g. the Sabaeans after occupying a city and slaughtering many of the inhabitants *w ʾys¹byw / kl / ʾwld / wʾnṯhw* "took captive all its children and women" (Ja 576/7). (13) In another recently rediscovered inscription, which reports on a war carried out against several cities in Ḥaḍramawt, including Šibām, many camels and small cattle etc. were captured and *ẖms¹y / ws¹ṯ / mʾtm / ʾwldm / wʾnṯm / s¹bym* "650 children and women were taken as captives" (Sh 32 = MB 2004 I-126/23). (14)

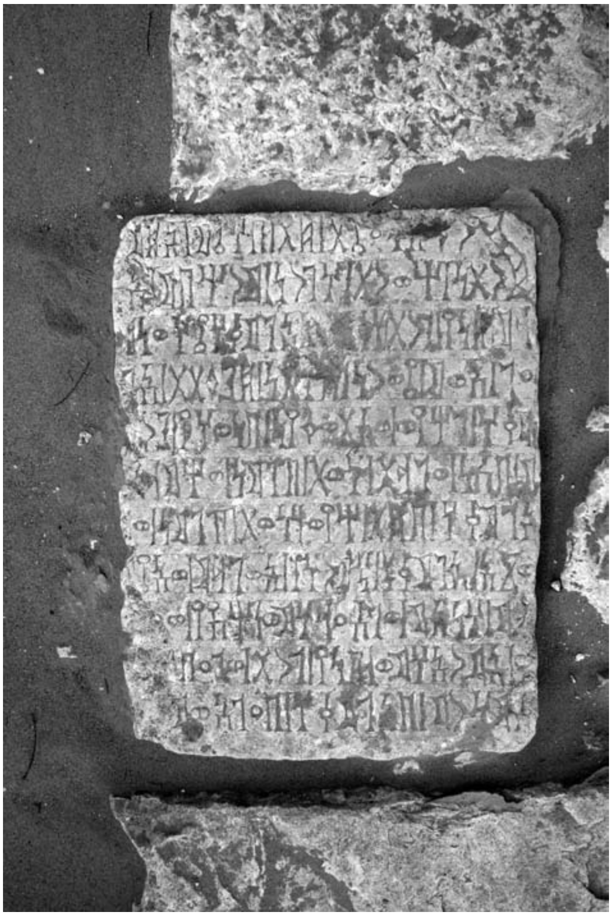


Figure 3. *An inscription mentioning a dedication from a woman, where she thanks Almaqah for the life of a son and the birth of a boy (MB 2005 I-62).*

Thanks for the life of a son and the birth of a boy

MB 2005 I-62

This text was found reused in the pavement of the Peristyle Hall, close to the north of the western row of inscriptions. Measurements: 28×20 cm, text: 26×20 cm. It can be dated according to the palaeography to around the second or third century AD (Fig. 3).

Text:

1. *r[fʾ]nʿṯt / ḏt / bhṯm / ʾḏm*
2. *rtn / ḥwrt / hgrn / mrḥbm / ʾ*
3. *dm / bny / grt / hqnyt / ʾlmqhṯhwnb*
4. *ʿl / ʾwm / ṯwrn / ḏhbn / ḏs²ftt / ʾl*

5. *mqh / lḥyw / ws^{1}twfyn / bnwhy / s^{2}r[ḥ]*
6. *m / bkn / wldt / ḡlmn / wḥmdt*
7. *ʾlmqh / bḏt / ḥyw / hwt / ḡlmn / wl*
8. *wzʾ / ʾlmqh / ẖmrhy / ʾwldm / wʾṯm*
9. *rm / hnʾm / wls^{1c}dhmw / ḥẓy / wr[ḍ]*
10. *w / ʾmrʾhmw / bny / grt / ws^{2c}b[hmw]*
11. *s^{1}mhrm / bʾlmqhb^{c}lʾwm*

Translation

1. Ra[faʾ]nā^{c}aṯt of the family of Bahiṯum the Aḏmirite
2. [from Ḏamār], resident of the city of Marḥabum,
3. client of the Bany Gurrat, dedicated to Almaqah Ṯahwān,
4. lord of Awām, a (statue of a) bull made of bronze, which she had promised
5. Almaqah for the life and protection of her son Šāriḥum
6. and because she gave birth to a child; and she praised
7. Almaqah because this male child survived. And may Almaqah
8. continue to grant her children and good fruits
9. and may He (Almaqah) grant them the favour and good will of their lord
10. of their lords, the Banī Gurrat and their people
11. Sumharum. By Almaqah, lord of Awām.

Commentary

The personal name *r[fʾ]n^{c}ṯt* "^{c}Aṯt has saved me" or "save me ^{c}Aṯt" is constructed from three elements: *rfʾ*, the pronominal suffix of the 1st person singular or plural (Sholan 1999: 27) and the theophoric element *^{c}ṯt*, an abbreviation of the divine name *^{c}ṯtr*. The reconstruction of the name *r[fʾ]n^{c}ṯt* is quite certain, cf. *rfʾnṯhw* "Ṯahw (epithet of Almaqah) has saved me" or "save me Ṯahw" (1999: 143). The word *ʾḏmrtn* is a *Nisbah*-form from the name of the city *ḏmr*, modern Ḏamār, south of Ṣan^{c}āʾ. Ḏmr is attested several times in Sabaic inscriptions (al-Sheiba 1987: 29). This appears to be the first mention of *mrḥbm* as a city, although it is known as a tribal name (Ir 30 §1, 31 §1, Ja 743/1). Bull statues given as offerings to Almaqah are attested many times (Sima 2000: 146–151, 153) and may have been symbols of fertility.

The status of women in the light of the Maḥram Bilqīs inscriptions

South Arabian civilization consisting of the Sabaean, Qatabanian, Ḥaḍramī, and Minaean traditions was patriarchal in its structure throughout its long history, from the beginning of the first millennium BC until the end of the sixth century AD (Beeston 1979: 120–122). Although women are commonly depicted in Sabaean art, there seems little doubt that their position was generally lower than that of men at all levels of society. The true role played by women has to be evaluated with some caution when using the records of their husbands, fathers, brothers, sons, and lords. However, the case is different with the small numbers of women's documents which survive, particularly those from Maḥram Bilqīs. These texts were, of course, commissioned by the women mentioned in them, and were not written by the women themselves. It seems to be that the scribes of the texts were men and as yet there are no South Arabian texts that can be said with certainty to have been written by women. All these facts make it difficult to reconstruct the status of women. In the following sections, several aspects of women's status in ancient South Arabia will be briefly presented.

Family and marriage

There is no term in Sabaic that corresponds precisely to the modern nuclear family consisting of father, mother, and children. The closest approximation is found in the word *byt* "house; village, estate; temple; clan, family, dynasty" (SD 34). This term, which is frequently translated as "family", had more the meaning of "clan" or "lineage" (Beeston 1972: 257f.). The Sabaean family was patriarchal in character and organization and its foundation was marriage. Several kinds of marriage were known in South Arabia: monogamy was the most common, but instances of polygamy, including both polygyny (*ʾḥs^{2}kthw* "his wives", Ry 520/5–6), *ʾḥs^{2}kthmy* "their wives" (Gar NIS 3/2–3), (15) and polyandry have been recorded, as well as examples of temporary marriage (CIH 581; Beeston 1978). (16) Polyandry is a form of marriage in which one woman is married to more than one man. The existence of this in ancient Yemen has been proved by Sabaic inscriptions (Wādī as-Sirr 1; YMN 19; Müller 1; Ryckmans J 1986; Avanzini 1991; Frantsouzoff 1999) (17) but it should be stressed that it was only rarely practised in ancient Yemen.

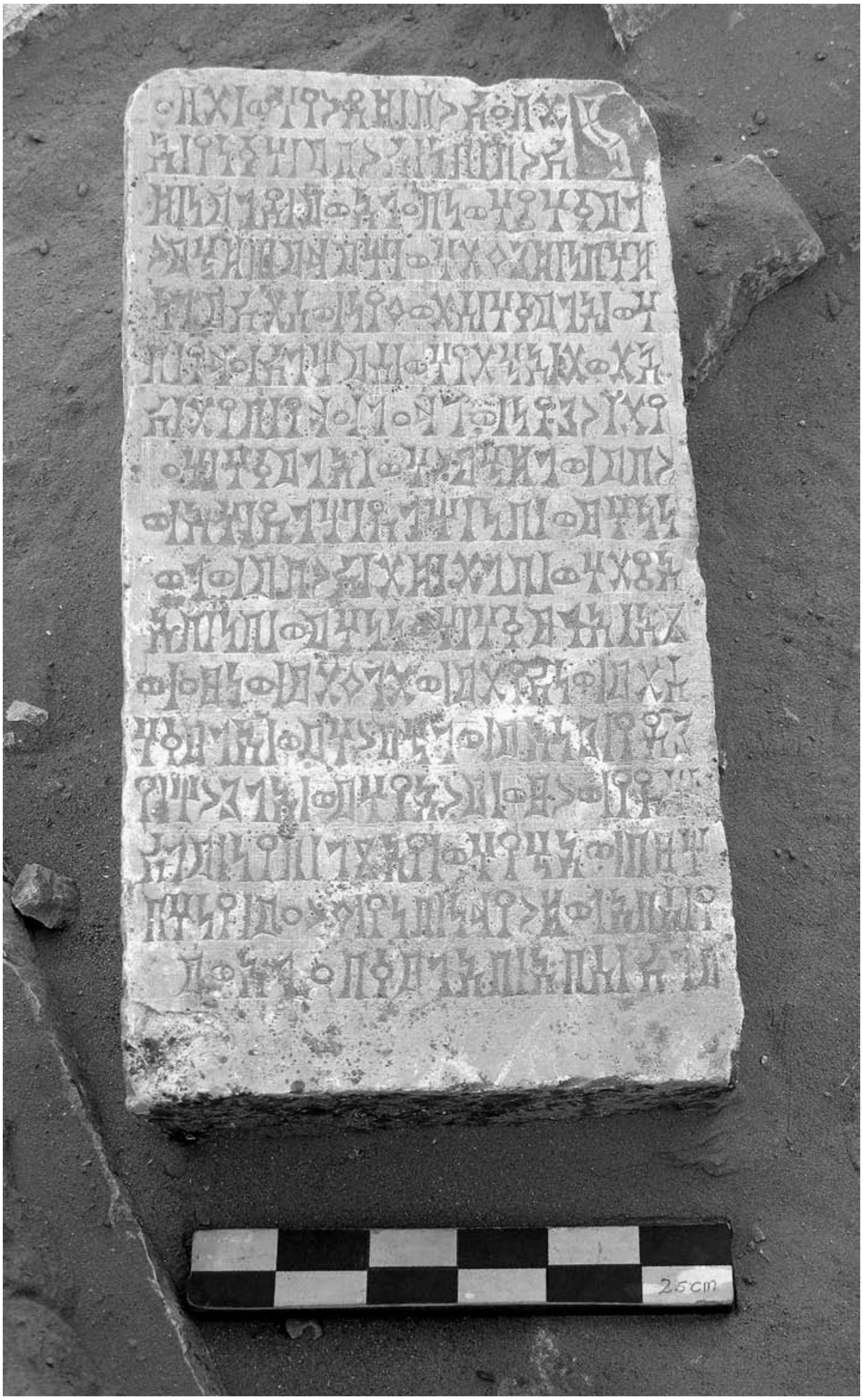


Figure 4. *A dedication for Almaqah from a man as thanks for the wedding of his two sisters (MB 2005 I-56).*

There is no precise term for marriage or a marriage contract in any of the ancient South Arabian languages, (18) and since we have no marriage contracts we do not know for certain what they would have been like or even whether contracts of this sort existed in a culture which can be described as very strictly collective. A.F.L. Beeston drew attention to the fact that marriage was a "union between two families" and not, as in Western culture, a partnership between two individuals (1979: 121), and this is absolutely correct. The Sabaean culture can be described as collectivism, i.e. a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, unified in-groups, which throughout a person's lifetime continue to protect them, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. Collectivist cultures place great emphasis on groups and think in terms of "we", as opposed to individualist cultures that stress the individual "I". This explains why, when the Sabaeans speak of married women in the clan, they always use the plural form such as *ʾṯthw / ḥs^{2}kthmw* "their (i.e. the clan's) wife" and *ʾwldhmw* "their children".

Newly married couples did not establish their own residence but instead became part of an existing household. While Sabaean marriage was primarily patrilocal, there is also evidence of some matrilocal or uxorilocal residence. It should also be noted that there is some epigraphic evidence of matrilineality in ancient Yemen, as has been observed by several scholars (e.g. Fa 76; Ja 700; see Beeston 1983; Ryckmans J 1986; Avanzini 1991; Korotayev 1995). (19)

After consummation of the marriage, the legal status of both parties was transformed, or at least clarified. Once married, the woman became a full member of her husband's clan and took on its affiliation, expressed by the designation *ḏt* "she of (the clan)" plus the name of her husband's clan. A variation is the formula *ḏt / byt* "she of the family" plus the name of her husband's family. There was thus a clear distinction between married and unmarried women. For instance *ʿmrlt / ḏt / s^{2}rḥm* "ʿAmrlāt of the clan Šarḥum" (Ja 721/1) was a woman who had married into the clan Šarḥum; and *s^{2}ẖẖ / ḏt / byt / hlkʾm* "Šaẖāẖ of the family Halʾakum" was one who had married into the family Halakʾum (Nāmī 27/1). An unmarried woman is designated as *bnt* X "daughter of X" in the inscriptions. (20) Sometimes the affiliation of the woman consists of the name of her own clan *and* the name of her husband's clan, for instance *ġnmm / bnt / ʿzmm / ḏt / ʾlʾl / ʾḥnkt* "Ġanīmum, daughter of ʿAzmum, she of [married into] the clan ʾAʾal, [the] Ḥankite" (CIH 450/1–2). There is one case of divorce in the Sabaic inscriptions (YMN 19; see Beeston 1997: 1–4).

Although we have no marriage contracts, we have some information about the marriage formulas that can help us understand some of the formulae in the arrangement of a marriage (RES 4233/9–10; Beeston 1981: 28; see also MAFRAY -Quṭrā 1/3–6). Another two good examples of the arrangement of marriages are the inscriptions Ir 24 §1–4 and MB 2005 I-56 (see below).

Dedication by a man in gratitude for the marriage of his two sisters

MB 2005 I-56

This text was discovered in area A. Measurements: 32×16×13 cm. This inscription can be dated to the middle of the third century AD (Fig. 4).

Text

1. *tbʿkrb / ḏṣryhw / tbʿ*
2. *krb / bn / krbm / hqny / ʾ*
3. *lmqhṯhwnbʿlʾwm / ṣlmn / ḏ*
4. *ḏhbn / ḏs^{2}fthw / ḥmdm / ḏẖmr*
5. *hw / ʾlmqh / s^{1}twfyn / ws^{1}tkmln*
6. *ʾtwt / ʾẖtyhw / s^{1}mḥlk / ʿdy / b*
7. *yt / r s^{2}yn / wgdʿl / ʿdy / byt / k*
8. *rbm / wlḏẖmrhw / ʾlmqh / hʿ*
9. *nnhmw / bn / ḥlẓ / ḥlẓ / hʾ / w*
10. *ʾṯthw / blt / ḏt / krbm / wlw*
11. *zʾ / ʾlmqh / hʿnnhmw / bn / bʾ*
12. *s^{1}tm / wnkytm / wtlfm / wnḍʿ / w*
13. *s^{2}ṣy / s^{2}nʾm / wlẖmrhmw / ʾlmqh*
14. *ḥẓy / wrḍw / mrʾyhmw / ʾl s^{2}rḥ / y*
15. *ḥḍb / wʾẖyhw / yʾzl / byn / mlk*
16. *y / s^{1}bʾ / wḏrydn / bny / frʿm / ynhb /*
17. *mlk / s^{1}bʾ / bʾlmqhbʿlʾwm*

Translation

1. Tubbaʿkarib, who is protected by Tubbaʿ
2. karib of the family Karibum, dedicated to
3. Almaqah Ṯahwān, lord of Awām, the bronze statue,
4. which he had promised him in gratitude because
5. Almaqah granted him the safe accomplishment of
6. the marriage of both his sisters: Sumuḥalak into
7. the family Rašyān and Gaddʿalā into the family
8. of Karibum, and because Almaqah granted them and delivered
9. them from a sickness they have suffered,

[namely] he and his
10. wife Balat of the family Karibum, and
11. may Almaqah continue to aid them
12. against evil, mischief, perishing, harm,
13. malice of an enemy, and may Almaqah
14. vouchsafe them the favour and good will of their lord ʾIlšaraḥ
15. Yaḥḍub and his brother Yaʾzul Bayn, king of
16. Sabaʾ and Ḏū-Raydān, both sons of Fariᶜum Yanhub
17. King of Sabaʾ. By Almaqah, lord of Awām.

Commentary

The personal name *tbᶜkrb* "Tubbaᶜ has blessed" is well attested in Sabaic (Tairan 1992: 88). The affiliation of the dedicator *tbᶜkrb* is not indicated in the text but instead there is included the expression *ḏ-rṣy-hw*, which means literally "who has protected". The root *ṣry* means "protect", cf. *ḏ-ṣry-hw* "protector" (SD 145). This phrase indicates that *tbᶜkr*b is a client. The protector has the same name and family name as the client, *tbᶜkrb / bn / krbm*. The formula, personal name + *ḏ-ṣry-hw*, is attested several times in Sabaic inscriptions (e.g. Ja 589/1–4, 703/1–2). (21) The object dedicated was *ṣlmn / ḏ-ḏhbn* "a statue made of bronze", which is the most often attested offering at the Awām temple (Sima 2000: 307 ff.).

The most significant part of this text is the marriage formula: ^{4}*…bḏt / ḫmr* ^{5}*hw / ʾlmqh / s*^{1}*twfyn / w- s*^{1}*tkmln* ^{6}*ʾtwt / ʾḫtyhw / s*^{1}*mḥlk / ᶜdy / b* ^{7}*yt / r s*^{2}*yn / w-gdᶜl / ᶜdy / byt / k* ^{8}*rbm / w-l-ḏ-ḫmrhmw* "in gratitude because Almaqah granted him the safeguard and accomplishment [i.e. the safe accomplishment] of the wedding ceremony of both his sisters: Sumuḥalak into the clan Rašyān and Gaddᶜalā into the family of Karibum" (lines 4–8). The best parallel for our text is an inscription from Maḥram Bilqīs discovered by the AFSM in the 1950s (Ir 24). This inscription contains a formula that reads:

rbᶜṯt / yǧnm / bn / ṣᶜqn / wtzʾd / w-nhmn / hqny / ʾlmqh / ṯhwn / bᶜlʾwm / ṣlmn / ḏ-ḏhbn / ḏ-s^2*fthw / ḥmdm / bḏt / ḫmr / ʾlmqh / ṯhwn / bᶜlʾwm / ᶜbdhw / rbᶜṯt / yǧnm / bn / ṣᶜqn / wtzʾd / w-nhmn / bʾmlʾ / wtb s*^{2}*r / s*^{1}*tmlʾ / wtb s*^{2}*rn / bᶜmhw / k-y s*^{1}*tkmln / w- s*^{1}*twfyn / lhw / ʾwln / whkrbn / w-hklln / mrʾtn / ḏ-t s*^{1}*tmyn / tḥyʾl / bt / bny / grfm / w-ṣᶜqm / ᶜdy / bythmw / byt / tzʾd*

"Rabᶜaṯt Yaǧnum of the family Ṣaᶜqān, Tazʾad and Nahmān dedicated to Almaqah Ṯahwān, lord of Awām, this statue made of bronze, which he promised him in gratitude because Almaqah Ṯahwān, lord of Awām, granted his servant Rabᶜaṯt Yaǧnum of the clan Ṣaᶜqān, Tazʾad and Nahmān the requests and the good news which he besought and asked from him, the safeguard and success to bring home, to marry and wed the woman who is named Taḥīʾīl of the family Banū Girāfum and Ṣaᶜqum, into their own family Tazʾad" (Ir 24 §1). (22)

The verbal root *hkrb* means "to make a contract of marriage". It was translated by the SD (79) as "unite a bride with one's own family". The term *hkll* in Ir 24 is translated by the SD (76) as "marry a wife". However, it seems that the expression for "to marry" is *hkrb*, as was suggested by A.F.L. Beeston (1983: 11), and *hkll* seems to have been the term for the wedding ceremony. Beeston translates *hkll* as "bring home a bride" (1983: 11).

The root ʾTW in our text is the key word to understanding this marriage formula. It is an expression for the wedding procession. The Sabaic root ʾTW literally means "come, come back". The term *ʾtwt* in our text can be compared with Sabaic *ʾtwt* which designates the "royal accession" (Ir 18 §1). Moreover, the term *ʾtyt* is used instead of *ʾtwt* with the same meaning in another inscription from Maḥram Bilqīs (Sh 18 = MB 2004 I-38/13). (23) This inscription reports the accession of the king Šāᶜirum Awtar in the royal palace of Salḥīn in Mārib.

The two women in our text left their family house to join the households of their husbands, *s*^{1}*mḥlk / ᶜdy / b* ^{7}*yt / r s*^{1}*yn* "Sumuḥalak to [her new home] the family Rašyān" and *gdᶜl / ᶜdy / byt / k* ^{8}*rbm* "Gaddᶜalā to [her new home] the family of Karibum". The family name of these women prior to their marriage is not mentioned. However, following marriage these two girls became full members in the families *rs*^{2}*yn* and *krbm* and used the designation *ḏt*. The Sabaean clan *rs*^{2}*yn* is known from other Sabaic inscriptions (Ir 34/3, RES 4815/3,4). The *bny / krbm* are mentioned in an inscription from Maḥram Bilqīs (CIAS II: 13f., 39.11/o2 no. 3/23). Both names of the women *s*^{1}*mḥlk* and *gdᶜl* are attested here for the first time in Ancient South Arabian inscriptions. *S*^{1}*mḥlk* is a compound name consisting of the theophoric element *s*^{1}*m* "(his) name" and *ḥlk* "to give" and may be translated as "Sumu (His name) has given", cf. *mlkḥlk* (Sholan 1999: 133). The name *gdᶜl* consists of the theophoric element *gd* "luck, fortune" and the verbal form *ᶜl*, root ᶜLY "to be exalted, high".

In line 10, the wife of the dedicator Tubbuᶜkarib is mentioned as *blt / ḏt / krb*. The personal name *blt* is found here for the first time in the Ancient South Arabian inscriptions. It may be interpreted according to the Sabaic

root BLT "send, despatch (someone) on a mission" (SD 29). Although the dedicator Tubbᶜkarib is mentioned without his family name, his wife is mentioned with the name of the family into which she has married, namely *ḏt / krbm*. This is the family name of her husband's protector. The king ᵓIlšaraḥ Yaḥḍub and his brother Yaᵓzul Bayn, kings of Sabaᵓ and Ḏū-Raydān reigned together *c.* AD 236–260.

The role of women in the family

The primary roles of Sabaean women were within the family. According to the available information on the lives of women which is available in various South Arabian sources, i.e. excavated artefacts, works of art such as reliefs and sculptures, as well as the epigraphic evidence, the primary role of the Sabaean woman was centred on the home, the family, and childcare. There are several examples in the inscriptions of a mother taking care of her daughter (e.g. Ja 731).

Economic and administrative roles

Although women were mostly outside the political or administrative hierarchies, they were able to participate in certain spheres of life beyond the home. The political and social structure of Sabaᵓ was dominated by the male élite (Beeston 1978; Korotayev 1996: 73ff.) and women were given very few obvious opportunities to play a part in the administration or in public ceremonies.

The inscriptions inform us about some posts held by women. Two women are described as *bᶜlty* (feminine of *bᶜl* "lord"), a high, possibly administrative, position in the area of Mārib (CIH 373). Another inscription (CIH 95) records that a woman had a high administrative position. Service was rendered by a man to a woman who had *wrṯt-hw* "inherited him" (Beeston 1983: 7). Some women held positions in the administration of temples (*bᶜlt*, see below), while two other women are recorded as having had the post of *mqtwyt* "an administrative position" (Nāmī 14/2; CIH 289/6).

One text mentions that a woman bears the title *mlkt / ḥḍrmwt* "queen of Ḥaḍramawt" (Ir 13/7). This woman was the wife of ᵓIlᶜazz Yaluṭ, king of Ḥaḍramawt. This text proves that royal marriages existed in ancient Yemen. Although we are not informed about women of the royal family, this woman was the daughter of the Sabaean king ᶜAlhān Nahfān (end of the second century AD) and sister of the Sabaean king Šāᶜirum Awtar (beginning of the third century AD). Otherwise, we are not informed about the wives of the kings, who must have been rich and influential given their high social position.

Sabaean women were able to hold property in their own name; they appear as builders of houses, and sometimes with their menfolk as paying for the construction of their own tombs with their own money (Beeston 1983; Robin 1996: 1196f.; Breton 1999: 97–100), and as businesswomen in some transaction documents which survive on palm-leaf stalks (Maraqten 2002: 82).

Cultic roles of women at Maḥram Bilqīs

It is clear from Sabaean texts and artistic monuments that both men and women could take an active part in demonstrating their piety, whether by making regular offerings to Almaqah, dedicating statues, or more devotedly by playing sacred roles inside the Awām temple. From the Middle Sabaean period there are testimonies to the involvement of women in various practices in the religious life. A woman usually designates herself in the dedicatory inscriptions as *ᵓmt* "worshipper, servant, devotee" of Almaqah (e.g. Ja 706/5; 751/11). Women used to make pilgrimages to this temple in the same way as men. The active role of women at the Awām was thus the visit to the temple and the performance of the offering. In one inscription Sabaean individuals promised Almaqah that if he would grant them a child that survived, they would not only make an offering but also *wlhwfrnn / ᵓṯthmw / wbnhmw / ᶜdy / mḥrmn / lḥmdnn / mqm / ᵓlmqhw* "they would let their wives and their sons perform a pilgrimage to the temple (i.e. Awām) to praise the power of Almaqah" (Ja 669/15–17).

It seems that the participation of women as worshippers is hidden behind common male language. Furthermore, their expressions of belief were recorded less often than those of men, both in texts and iconography. However, there is evidence from Maḥram Bilqīs for the participation of women in cult rituals. It is to be noted that in the inscriptions, the offerings made by women are primarily female bronze statues while men dedicated male statues. (24) In addition, there are stelae representing women giving an offering to the divinity (e.g. YM 386).

Meanwhile, there are many Old Sabaic inscriptions which mention the dedication of persons to several deities, among them Almaqah, and inscriptions of this type have been discovered at the Awām temple. (25) The duty of these persons was to perform the services at the temple. The majority of those mentioned are men, although women are occasionally cited (e.g. RES 4808).

This means that women were not really involved in temple service in this period. (26)

In general, women did not play an important role in the administration of Maḥram Bilqīs and according to the records so far discovered none of the women appear to have been priestesses of Almaqah at Awām. However, in a recently discovered inscription at Awām a woman bears the title *rs^{2}yt ḥrwnm* "priestess of (the temple) Ḥarūnum". This temple must be located in the city of Mārib (MB 2005 I-39, Maraqten 2005: 378f.). In the official religion, a Sabaean woman did not stand back while a male mediated between her and the deity. Sabaean women received their oracles from Almaqah like the menfolk. There were women who were associated with sorcery and witchcraft according to an inscription from Maḥram Bilqīs (Ja 735; Müller 1988: 450–452). (27) This inscription records a prayer for rain and mentions the role of women in the rituals carried out in this prayer. One group of women is designated as *bnt mrb* "daughters of Mārib". Another two groups are *rqt* "female magicians" (Ja 735/9) and *ᶜṭwf* "female invocators" (Ja 735/9). (28) There is evidence for the sacred marriage in ancient Yemen (Müller 1993: 15–28) but there is no clear evidence of such a ritual associated with the Awām temple.

There were also two women who were religious specialists in the temple of the Sun-goddess Ḏāt Baᶜdān (Nāmī 74/6; Müller 1988: 449–450). One of them had the position *bᶜlt* "an administrative position in the temple" and the other was *ḥlmt* "interpreter of dreams" (Nāmī 74/6).

All countries of the ancient Near East shared the belief that one had to be pure to approach a deity. This was an important rule at the Awām as is proved by recently discovered epigraphic material. With regard to women, their vaginal discharge was considered impure in ancient Yemen and in particular in the Awām temple. In fact we have some good information about this from the so-called confession and expiation inscriptions and prescriptions. In particular, we have evidence from the texts found in the Awām dealing with the cultic impurity of women. (29) A woman made a dedication ...*b-ḏ-bhʾt / m* ^{8}*ḥrmhw / wʾlbs^{1}hw / ʾ* ^{9}*l / ẓy* "because she entered his temple [i.e. Awām] while her clothes were not pure" (YM 441= CIAS I: 87, 39.11/r1). (30)

In one recently discovered prescription we read: ^{2} …*w-ḏ-ybhʾn / w-ʾl / ẓy / w-ʾl / tr* ^{3}*ḥḍ*... "and whoever enters [i.e. the Awām temple] [ritually] impure and without the ritual washing..." (MB 2005 I-58). This person, either a man or a woman, should be punished as the inscription states in the first line: "let him be aware of [his crime] and let him perform expiation". If they did not follow the rules for visiting this temple, women and men could be punished by the wrath of Almaqah through sickness etc. There is no evidence of cultic prostitution in ancient Yemen, and sexual intercourse was forbidden in the Awām temple. In the same prescription we read: ^{1}...*l-yḥḏrn / w-l-ynḏrn / ḏ-ys^{3}yfn / ʾnṯtm / bws^{1}ṭ / mḥr* ^{2}*mn* " ... let him be aware of [his crime] and let him perform an expiation: whoever has sexual intercourse with a woman inside the temple [i.e. Awām]" (MB 2005 I-58/1–2). (31) The verb *s^{3}yf* in this text is to be understood as "have sexual intercourse with a woman". This interpretation is based on the Arabic root SWF, cf. Arabic *sāwafa l-marʾata = ḍājaᶜa-hā* "He slept with the woman in, or on, one bed" (Lane 1469). To give the meaning of *sāwafa* as *ḍājaᶜa* "have sexual intercourse with a woman" makes the meaning *s^{3}yf* in this context quite certain.

Three categories of divinities seem to have existed in ancient South Arabia. The first were the official divinities, i.e. the national deities such as Almaqah, the state and national god of the Sabaeans. The second category included the tribal or local deities such as Taʾlab, the god of Sumᶜy, north of Ṣanᶜāʾ. The third category comprised the household and personal deities, and these represented popular religion. All three categories were worshipped by women in ancient South Arabia.

All women's inscriptions discovered at Maḥram Bilqīs are dedicated to Almaqah. This was because of his power as a god of fertility. Women who worshipped other deities and who lived in Mārib or in other regions such as the highlands of Yemen still used to come to Awām and make dedications to Almaqah.

It seems that women in ancient South Arabia, and particularly in Sabaʾ, preferred to worship specific deities, such as the Banātʾīl "Daughters of ʾĪl", i.e. the three goddesses Al-Lāt, al-ᶜUzzā, and Manāt; or Bitayʾīl "the two daughters of ʾĪl", i.e. Al-Lāt and al-ᶜUzzā, who were known in both North and South Arabia (Robin 2000: 113ff.). The South Arabian "Daughters of ʾĪl" are part of a low-ranking class of divinities belonging to popular religion. These female deities are particularly invoked by women and were preferred by them, as we can see from the amulets on which the names Al-Lāt (South Arabian *ltn*) and al-ᶜUzzā (South Arabian *ᶜzyn*) are inscribed (Ryckmans J 1980; Maraqten 1999).

The goddess Umm ᶜAṯtar "Mother of ᶜAṯtar" seems to have played the role of a Mother Goddess and was also a favourite deity of women (CIH 544). Two new

confession inscriptions regarding women dedicated to the god Almaqah and mentioning Umm ᶜAṯtar have recently been discovered (MB 2004 S I-59; MB 2004 I-22). The term *ʾmh*, plural of *ʾmt* in this text, seems to refer to a kind of service or administration which the two women carried out. Meanwhile, dedications by women were also offered to the South Arabian supreme deity Aṯtar (Nāmī 14; CIH 289). A divinity which seems to have appealed to women is the vulture deity Nasr/Naswar, *ns^{1}r / ns^{1}wr* (Müller 1994). Further dedications of women were submitted to the goddess *nws^{2}m* (Robin-Itwa 1, Robin 1982, i: 59).

A favourite deity of women was *bᶜl / bytn* "lord of the house". He is mentioned several times in relation to women or women's dedications (e.g. YM 2403), *bᶜlbythmw* "lord of their house" (Nāmī 22/2–6, CIH 179). A personal god seems to have been very popular in the everyday life of the Sabaeans. It is known primarily as *s^{2}ymn* "the patron god" in Sabaic texts, especially on the inscribed sticks. *S^{2}ymn* appears frequently in the greetings formula in Sabaic letters by both women and men. Sometimes goddesses are preferred, such as the sun-goddess Ḏāt Ḥamīm (ᶜAbdallah 1996: 18ff.). Women also made dedications to what is called *ʾlhhw* "her (personal) god" (YM 2402/2, see Sholan 2005: 51ff.).

Researchers have observed that the names given to women in ancient South Arabia were of special types and forms (Sholan 1999: 27–29). Women's composite personal names contain the names of specific goddesses, which would suggest that these goddesses were preferred by women. Many of these names express the private piety of women. For instance, names composed with Almaqah or his epithets have been found. The only personal name composed with Almaqah's name is the woman's name *ʾmtʾlmqh* "servant of Almaqah" (1999: 97). Otherwise, his name seems to have been considered taboo for use in personal names. However, his epithet Ṯahwān (*ṯhwn*) and the abbreviations of it, *ṯhw* and *ṯwn*, are used frequently in the women's names found in the inscriptions of Maḥram Bilqīs, e.g. *ʾm<t>ṯwn* "servant of Ṯawn", *hnʾṯwn* "fortune of Ṯawn", *rfʾnṯhw* "Ṯahu has saved us/me" (1999: 99, 118, 143). There is only one name of a woman that is composed with *ʾwm* and this is *kmlʾwm* "Awām is complete" (1999: 128).

Although we lack any accurate data about the religious status of women in ancient Yemeni society, women seem to have had an important role in popular religion. This can be seen in their worship of various household and personal deities. These deities appear to have included those that protected women, including at times of childbirth.

Women's health care

Several dedicatory inscriptions by women provide information about their state of health. For instance, a woman named Amatalmaqah made a dedication to Almaqah for the healing of another woman named Naḍi.-rat "from a sickness that affected her eyes" (*bn / mrḍ / mrḍt / ᶜynhw*, Ja 706/6–7). Another woman made her dedication on behalf of her daughter because Almaqah had cured "her daughter Rabībatgawbān from the sickness she suffered" (*bnthw / ^{6}[r]bbtgwbn / bn / kl / ^{7}ʾmrḍ / mrḍt*, Ja 731/5–7). (32)

The purification of women after childbirth and hygiene during menstruation was demanded in Sabaean society (see above); having sexual intercourse with a woman immediately after childbirth or during menstruation was not only considered an abomination and a perversion but was punished by the deity, to judge by several penitential inscriptions (e.g. Haram 40 = CIH 523, Ryckmans J 1972). However, we are informed about a woman who seems to have been affected by a disease during pregnancy. This woman, who bears the name Abḥalak, made an offering to Almaqah *bḏt / s^{2}rḥ / wmtᶜn ^{6}grbhw / bhry / hryt / bẖr ^{7}f / s^{1}mhkrb / bn / ʾbkrb / b[k] ^{8}n / ḥmdt / bn / ẖbṭn / kwn / b ^{9}hwt / ẖrfn* "in gratitude because he [Almaqah] protected and delivered her person when she became pregnant in the month of Sumhukarib, son of Abkarib — and for that she gave praise — from an epidemic that was spread in that year" (Ja 751/5–9; Preißler 1979: 273f.). (33) The woman here remained healthy throughout an epidemic and made this offering as a thanksgiving. No data about midwives are available and their work may have been carried out by old women or the women's mothers, as in more recent times.

In an offering by a woman to Almaqah in the Awām temple, which is located near Ṣanᶜāʾ, the main motivation is stated to be *bḏt / s^{2}w ^{8}[f] / wwfyn / wmtᶜn / ʾlmqhbᶜlʾwm / grb / ʾmthw / l[t]^{9}wf / bt / btᶜ / bn / mwld / wldt / ḡlmm / ḏkrm / myt[m] / ^{10}ḡyr / qllt / mwnn / bmḥgl / whᶜnhw / ws^{2}rḥ / grbh ^{11}[w] / ʾlmqhbᶜlʾwm / bn / hwt / mrḍn* "in gratitude because Almaqah, lord of Awām saved, protected and delivered the body of his worshipper Litwaf the Bataᶜid from a [hard] confinement in which she gave a birth to a male child [which subsequently] died, [and] the moaning of giving the birth in the chamber of confinement was not little [and] Almaqah, lord of Awām protected her body from that sickness" (CIAS II: 49f., 39.11/o3, no 8/7–11 = Ja 2109, Preißler 1994: 227). (34)

The epigraphic material from Maḥram Bilqīs proves

that the majority of inscriptions by women concerning their health have been found in this temple and the dedications were made to Almaqah as a healing deity. Among the newly discovered inscriptions from Maḥram Bilqīs are several texts which mention that the reason for the dedications by women was because Almaqah had cured them or their daughters from sickness. Others deal with women's healthcare in general. In one inscription thanks are given for the safety of a woman in childbed. It states that this dedication was in gratitude *²...lwldt / hᵓ / ᵓṯtn / bḥrlt / ḏt / ᶜḏr ³n / ḡlmm / mytm* … "because she, that woman Baḥrlāt of the family ᶜAḏrān, has born a dead boy" and she had survived the birth, even though the child died (MB 2004 I-109/2–3). In another dedication by a woman as thanks for delivery from sickness we read that this was *⁴bḏt / rbḫt / bn / ḥlẓ / ḥlẓ ⁵t* "in gratitude because she had been cured from a sickness she suffered" (MB 2005 I-20/4).

The desire to have children was very strong in ancient Yemen, as in other parts of the ancient Near East. The large number of infant deaths through disease, birth defects, and accidents, together with the need to increase the labour force, as well as to provide heirs to facilitate the orderly transmission of property, made it necessary to have large families. For instance, in one case a woman had no surviving children. She made a votive offering to Almaqah because she promised him that whenever He would vouchsafe her children, she would make a dedication for him. Almaqah has now vouchsafed to her the life of two sons, so she made the offering as a fulfilment of her vow. She states in her inscription as follows: *wr ⁸ᵓ / ḫmrhw / ḫyw / bnyhw ⁹ṯwbᵓl / wᶜmrm* "and now he [Almaqah] has vouchsafed to her the life of two sons Ṯawbᵓīl and ᶜAmrum" (Ja 717/7–9).

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Notes

1 Several papers have been delivered to the Seminar for Arabian Studies about these discoveries and published in the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (e.g. Glanzman 2002).

2 A woman bearing the name *gḥmt* is mentioned in the Old Sabaic inscriptions of Yalā (cited by Sholan 1999: 35, 60).

3 These stelae are still unpublished although some were exhibited in the Yemen exhibition at the British Museum and elsewhere and published in the accompanying catalogues (e.g. Daum *et al.* 1999: 296; Simpson ed. 2002: 198ff.). A. Sholan considered these texts in her dissertation (1999).

4 These texts were discovered in unscientific digging, primarily in the Yemeni Jawf. There are several thousands of these texts (see Ryckmans, Müller & Abdallah 1994). For instance, one mentions a contract with a woman dealing with raising animals (ᶜAbdallah 1994: 1–12). Y. ᶜAbdallah (1996) published a letter from a woman. Another text — a receipt — mentions a woman repaying a debt (Maraqten 2002: 82). The author of the present paper is currently working on the publication of the collection in the National Museum of Ṣanᶜāᵓ and has published several articles on this subject. In addition, P. Stein is working on the collection of the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek, Munich (see Stein 2006). However, here it is not possible to consider the information gained from the inscribed sticks, since this is not within the scope of this paper.

5 Three recently discovered women's inscriptions have been published by the author. These are MB 2005 I-39, MB 2005 I-93, MB 2004 I-113 (Maraqten 2005). Apart from these inscriptions and the two others (MB 2005 I-62, MB 2005 I-56) published here, all MB inscriptions cited in this paper are unpublished.

6 Although this work is a philological analysis of the names, the author gives some valuable information about the contexts of the occurrences of the women's names (Sholan 1999: 42–88).

7 More recent evidence of *qrs²t* has been discovered (Dār al-Šukr/3,4,6,7, YM 17189/3; Bron & Gajda 2005: 116ff. translates *qrs²t* as "trésorière").

8 The translations of these terms follow the SD (cf. also Sholan 1999: 12–24).

9 For another text mentioning a dedication made by a man and his wife, see Ja 750.

10 There are other expiation and confession inscriptions by women relating to the god Ḏū-Samāwī, see Haram 33 = CIH 532, Haram 34 = CIH 533, Haram 35 = RES 3956, Haram 36 = RES 3957, Haram 40 = CIH 543, Haram 56 = CIH 568.

11 This text has been published (Maraqten 2005).

12 This divinity is known only from two other inscriptions (CIH 554, Nāmī 19, republished in Daum *et al*. 1999:

304). On the goddess Umm ᶜAṯtar, see Höfner (1970: 275–277) who suggests that she may have been a sun-goddess.

13 There is good information about the capture of women in pre-Islamic times in the so-called *Ayyām al-ᶜarab*. This title, which literally means "the days of the Arabs", denotes the battles and raids between the Arab tribes in the period before the rise of the Islam (see Lichtenstädter 1935: 20–38).

14 This inscription was published as a fragmentary text by Šarafaddīn (2004: 353f.). Fortunately, it was rediscovered in the 2004 season of AFSM excavations. The inscription is complete and contains thirty-two lines.

15 These two examples of polygyny are uncertain since the word *ʾḥs²kt* (pl. of *ḥs²kt*) "wives" can be a general indication or a collective designation for their wives, like "their sons", in the clan.

16 Classical Arabic sources mention that several kinds of marriage were known among the Arabs before Islam (Smith 1903: 67, 276f.).

17 See also the critical view of J. Ryckmans (1986: 413).

18 The Akkadian term for a marriage contract is *riksātum* or *riksū* (see Westbrook 1988: 29).

19 See also the discussion in Frantsouzoff 1999. There is more evidence from the inscriptions recently discovered at Maḥram Bilqīs.

20 On the evidence for women and their filiations, see Sholan 1999: 9–20.

21 *ḏ-ṣry-hw* was understood by Jamme (1962: 96) as a family name.

22 Beeston (1981: 27) translates the passage *kys¹tkmln / w- s¹twfyn / lhw / ʾwln / whkrbn / w-hklln / mrʾtn / ḏt- s¹tmyn / tḥʾl / bt / bny / grfm / w-ṣᶜqm / ᶜdy / bythmw / tzʾd* as "that it should have been successfully achieved for him, to *ʾwl* and *hkrb* and *hkll* the lady TḤʾL of GRFM-ṢᶜQM into their own house, that of TZʾD" (Ir 24 §1). Beeston translates the three verbs in this passage as "bring home (the bride)" (cf. *tʾwl* "return home" in a military context), "tie the marital knot" (Arabic *ᶜaqd al-nikāḥ*), and "consummate (the marriage)" (cf. also Beeston 1979: 121).

23 This inscription was rediscovered in the 2004 season. It contains twenty-two lines.

24 On references to female and male bronze statues in the published Sabaic inscriptions from Maḥram Bilqīs, see Sima 2000: 307ff.

25 A woman named Ẓūrᶜadan (*ẓwrᶜdn*) who was dedicated for the service of Mutabnaṭyān, the city deity of Haram, is mentioned in one inscription (Haram 6/4 = CIH 514/4). On these texts see Höfner 1970: 333f.

26 In an inscription from the Barʾān temple (DAI Barʾān 1988 1/B) a woman named Farᶜat (*frᶜt*) was dedicated to Almaqah to carry out services at the Barʾān temple. This siglum is cited according to a personal communication in Sholan 1999: 58 as an unpublished inscription (see below). However, the name of a woman *frᶜt* occurs in other inscriptions engraved on altars from Barʾān (DAI Barʾān 1988-2, DAI Barʾān 1994-5, DAI Barʾān 1996-1, published in Nebes 2005: 119) and seems to be the same person as above. N. Nebes (2005: 11) considers *frᶜt* to be a person or an altar. However, it should be considered as a name of a person since such category inscriptions are known from several inscriptions.

27 This inscription is engraved on two stone blocks. Fortunately, the recent AFSM excavations have brought to light the stone bearing the lower part of the text, which allows us to correct the previous reading.

28 The SD (22) translates this word as "support, escort" and considers the meaning as uncertain.

29 The matter of purity is attested in several expiation and confession inscriptions dedicated to the god Ḏū-Samāwī. In one text, a woman bearing the name *ʾḫyt* / (Uḫayyat) made a dedication "because she went out to his courtyard and she was not pure" (*bḏt / wḍʾt / ᶜ 6dy / mwṭnn / ġyr / ṭh 7rm*, Haram 33/5–7 = CIH 532/5–7). Also, see the women's dedications to Ḏū-Samāwī regarding impurity (Haram 40 = CIH 523, Haram 35 = RES 3956, Haram 36 = RES 3957; see also Ryckmans J 1972).

30 In a similar inscription a woman was punished with sickness in her breast for nine months because she visited an Awām temple of Almaqah located near Ṣanᶜāʾ, while wearing unsuitable clothes (NAM 2494 = CIAS II: 41–44, 39.11/o3 no. 6).

31 The verb *s³yf* is attested in Sabaean in a penitential text from Maḥram Bilqīs (Ja 702/15–16) and in another fragmentary text possibly of a penitential nature (Ja 570/5). However, the SD (140) does not give a translation of these two examples. See also the discussion by N. Nebes 1995: 31f. and his translation of the phrase *whʾ / f-l / s³y 16f / ḥwlm / mykbt / bhw* as "und er (*sc.* ʾAlmaqah) möge den Traum gewähren, in dem es eine Orakelentscheidung gibt" (Ja 702/15). We have other expiation and confession inscriptions that inform us about men who made a sin-dedication because they had had sexual intercourse with women in a temple, see Daum *et al*. 1999: 290, München

94–317880, cf. also CIH 533.

32 Many of these inscriptions simply give general information such as *ḥmdm / b ⁴ḏt / mtᶜ / ᵓmthw / s²f ⁵nqyn / ḏt / s¹ṭrn / bn / ḥ ⁶lẓ / ḥlẓt* "in gratitude because he (the lord of the house) delivered his worshipper Šāfnāqayn of the family *ḏt s¹ṭrn* from a sickness that she suffered" (from Nāᶜiṭ, Nāmī 22).

33 Another text by a woman who was afflicted with an epidemic disease is CIH 557.

34 The SD's (89) translation of the term *mwnn* as "provision, food" is not satisfactory, but it may derive from the root ᵓNN, cf. the Arabic verb *anna* "He moaned; or uttered a moan, or moaning, or prolonged voice of complaint; or said, Ah! " (Lane 103), and the nouns *annah*, *anīn* "a moan, moaning or prolonged voice of complaint ... or a cry" (Lane 111).

Sigla

DAI Barᵓān 1988 1/B	Inscription in Robin & Vogt 1997: 144, 233 = Simpson ed. 2002: 164, fig. 58.
CIAS	Inscriptions in *Corpus des inscriptions et antiquités sud-arabes*. Louvain: Peeters, 1977–1986.
CIH	Inscriptions in *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum* Pars IV. Paris: Reipublicae Typographeo, 1889–1932.
DAI	Deutsches Archäologisches Institut.
Dār al-Šukr	Inscriptions published in Bron & Gajda 2005: 116ff.
DJE 10	Inscription discovered by the Deutsche Jemen-Expedition, and published in Müller 1972.
Fa 3	Höfner 1976.
Fa 76	Inscription discussed in Korotayev 1995.
Gar NIS 3	Inscription in Garbini 1973.
Hamilton 9	Inscription in Brown & Beeston 1954.
Haram	Inscriptions from Haram in Robin 1992.
Ir	Inscriptions in al-Iryānī 1990.
Ja 550–851,	Inscriptions in Jamme 1962.
Ja 525	Inscription in Jamme 1955.
Lane	Lane 1863–1893.
MAFRAY-Quṭra 1	Inscriptions published in Robin 1979, republished in Müller 1983, and discussed in Kropp 1998.
MB	Registration siglum of inscriptions discovered by the AFSM excavations at Maḥram Bilqīs.
Müller 1	Inscription in Müller 1974.
Nāmī 14, 19, 22, 27, 74	Inscriptions in Nāmī 1943.
Ry 520	Inscription in Ryckmans G 1954.
RES	*Répertoire d'épigraphie sémitique*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1900–1968.
Robin-Itwa 1	Inscription in Robin 1982.
SD	Beeston *et al.* 1982.
Sh	Šarafaddīn 2004.
Wādī as-Sirr 1	Inscription in Stiegner 1981.
YM	Inscriptions in the Yemen Museum.
YM 2402	Inscription in Sholan, Antonini & Arbach 2005.
YM 2403	Inscription in Daum *et al.* 1999: 282–283.
YMN 19	Inscriptions in ᶜAbdallah 1990 and republished in Beeston 1997.
YM 17189/3	Inscriptions published in Bron & Gajda 2005: 116ff.
ZI 24	Inscription in ᶜInān 2003.

For further sigla see Kitchen 2000.

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